

## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**The Governor's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Health & Safety Conference  
The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
Island of Saipan, August 16, 2005**

**Honorable Juan Babauta and honorable guests, good morning and Aloha.**

**I am honored to be here on your beautiful island of Saipan representing the State of Hawaii at the Governor's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Safety and Health Conference.**

**I would like to especially thank Governor Juan Babauta for hosting this important event and demonstrating his continued commitment to workplace safety. I would also like to thank Mr. Richard Pierce, Mr. Al Johnson, the Co-Chairs of the Alliance of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and OSHA for sponsoring and organizing this conference. I commend them for being leaders, advocates and educators in safety and health for the CNMI.**

**I would also like to commend Mr. Frank Strasheim for his courageous leadership and tireless commitment to ensure that everyone – regardless of their nationality – enjoys a safe and healthy workplace. There is no doubt that the CNMI is a safer and**

**healthier place to work and live because of Mr. Strasheim's tireless efforts.**

**At this time, I would like to take a few minutes to read a special letter from Linda Lingle, the Governor of the State of Hawaii, to all of you.**

**<READ LETTER> (click here for letter)**

**I would like to extend Governor Lingle's invitation by being the first to invite you to our Governor's Pacific Rim Conference in Honolulu in May 10 – 12, 2006.**

**It's wonderful to look across this room and see people representing a cross-section of the CNMI industries, government officials and employee safety and health advocates.**

**I share Governor Babauta's strong commitment to workplace safety and health, and look forward to assisting his administration and all of you in this endeavor. I urge you to take advantage of your time at this conference to learn, network, collaborate and share ideas and experiences.**

**The theme of this conference is, "Striving for Excellence in Worker, Public, Environmental Safety and Health Protection". The fact that**

**several hundred of you are here today, is a testament to the genuine interest of business owners, employers, health and safety professionals, and employees, to ensure your workforce is provided with a safe and healthful work environment.**

**The prevention of workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities in the workplace has a far-reaching effect. Not only do you preserve the quality of life here for yourselves, families and children, but throughout this region.**

**We all know that workplace accidents can have a devastating impact on a worker's family and are costly to businesses and a hindrance to a thriving economy.**

**From a management and government perspective, there is no better return, financially and morally, than a workforce that is educated in safety and health, and a worksite that is free from unnecessary hazards. As employers, you realize an immediate return because a safe and healthy workforce translates to higher productivity and lower health care costs.**

**From an employee's perspective, knowing that the worksite is safe and healthy promotes a trusting relationship with their employer, worker satisfaction, and removes any threat of workplace hazards that can and should be avoided.**

**In Hawaii, employers and employees, with the help of many safety and health professionals like those in this room, have been successful in providing a safe and healthy workplace. This is evidenced by the dramatic decline in workplace accidents by 29% since 1995.**

**While this decline clearly illustrates that Hawaii, like the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, is a community that is dedicated to safety and health, we must increase our efforts and sustain our focus in this area.**

**I would like to share with you what my Department has been doing to enable businesses in Hawaii to succeed and contribute to the economic growth of Hawaii, while ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for our residents.**

**In the past, the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations' Occupational Safety and Health Division has had a reputation of being adversarial and heavy-handed in enforcing safety and health laws. There was a great deal of distrust of the agency.**

**Since coming to the department two and a half years ago, our objective has been to correct this perception and attitude by working in partnership with businesses and assisting them with accident prevention and containment of costs.**

**Strong, effective and fair enforcement continues to be the foundation of our administration's principles. However, we believe that we can be more effective and accomplish more by collaborating and partnering with businesses who truly care about their employees.**

**One of the first things we did was to begin establishing a foundation of trust and respect and a fairer platform that would create win-win situations for employers and employees.**

**Listening to businesses and employers, assisting and educating people versus purely enforcing and citing companies for violations, and working together toward a common goal, has resulted in a much-improved relationship between government and the business community.**

**As many of you are already aware, partnerships and cooperative programs are an outstanding way to successfully promote safety and health in the CNMI worksites.**

**I have to commend the leadership and foresight of former Assistant Secretary John Henshaw, and the current Assistant Secretary, Jonathan Snare, the head of OSHA for placing national focus on Cooperative and Voluntary programs like the Voluntary Protection**

**Program, or, VPP, and the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program, also known as SHARP.**

**These programs not only promote safety and health, but they have saved employers billions of dollars each year.**

**Mr. Henshaw once said, “Why VPP? Why does OSHA continue to recognize the best of the best?”**

**His answer was, “We do VPP because it keeps people whole and reduces human suffering. Every worker has family and loved ones. We do it so we can send workers home in the same condition that they came to work.”**

**These guiding principles are the reasons many of you are attending this conference today. We encourage business owners to reach for the stars and join the many companies across the nation that have achieved VPP or SHARP certification.**

**Through their efforts, the OSHA family nationwide has increased VPP participation to 1,230 large businesses and has certified 736 small businesses for SHARP. Nationally, there are now 304 Alliances similar to yours, which promote the value of safety and health and increase training and outreach.**

**In 2003, under the leadership of Governor Lingle, we renewed our focus in Hawaii, on national and state achievement and recognition programs. During this time, Hawaii had a single company participating in the VPP, and no one participating in SHARP.**

**Today, we are pleased to have 3 companies that have earned VPP status and 24 companies being recognized in SHARP. We also have nearly 50 companies currently working with our department to become SHARP certified.**

**Compared to where we were two and half years ago, these results demonstrate that collaboration and cooperation works, and that most businesses are truly committed to their employee's safety and well-being. These programs have also enthused award recipients to approach safety and health through innovative and productive ways.**

**It is highly encouraging and a lot more productive to work on “possibilities” and solutions with businesses. Working together has generated a whole different energy and spirit that promotes a more unified approach and attitude in employers, employees, labor, government, and businesses in focusing on protecting the health and safety of our workers and ultimately, their families.**

**Many of you may be aware that Hawaii is currently experiencing a tremendous boom in the construction industry. While this is contributing to a robust economy for the state, we have also seen an alarming increase in the issuance of citations for the lack of utilizing fall protection gear at construction sites.**

**Through another collaborative approach and plan to address this extremely critical situation, we have developed a community outreach and public awareness program that focuses on fall protection.**

**This campaign, entitled, “Tie Off . . . It’s Your Life”, will involve several leading construction companies in Hawaii who will participate by posting banners at construction sites, contributing to television, print and radio spots, and supporting training efforts that encourage workers to use fall protection.**

**I am pleased to announce that as I speak with you here today, our department and partners are filming the first television spots, which will be unveiled in Hawaii next week.**

**The goal of this public awareness campaign is to encourage construction workers to wear proper fall protection or “tie-off”. If not for themselves, then they should do it for their wife, children,**



**their loved ones and families --- often referred to as their “ohana” in Hawaii.**

**As you look forward to a very bright and prosperous era for your islands, Governor Babauta and others are very eager to work with employees, employers, safety and health officials and government to establish the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands as one of the safest and healthiest place to work and do business. I encourage all of you to embrace this idea and join with them.**

**It has been an honor to share a few comments with you this morning. I will be here for the rest of the conference and hope to have the chance to meet many of you. This conference is a great opportunity for us to interact and share best practices, and I truly appreciate being a part of it.**

**Enjoy the conference!**

**Aloha!**